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TAGS: [KIRF](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [UZ](#)

SUBJECT: NATIONWIDE PROSECUTION OF FAITH-BASED NGO

Classified By: Amb. Jon R. Purnell for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: According to senior management at the faith-based NGO Central Asian Free Exchange (CAFE), the GOU has launched a coordinated effort to prosecute several of its regional offices. Seven of its nine provincial offices have come under scrutiny by the Ministry of Justice (MOJ). These branches have been reportedly barraged with numerous administrative charges, requests for re-registration and comprehensive audits. Because the NGO registered each office independently, the GOU must prosecute each individual branch in order to shut the entire organization down. End Summary.

¶2. (C) During civil court proceedings in the three Ferghana Valley cities of Andijon, Kokand and Ferghana, CAFE is being accused of conducting missionary activities and proselytizing. These allegations resulted in the ordered closure of the Ferghana and Kokand branch offices on May 19. According to the GOU, these charges were backed by "credible" testimony and written statements from several villagers. CAFE officials believe that National Security Service (NSS) officers were gathering false statements from area residents several weeks ago with the intention of using them in court proceedings. Kokand Staff members noted that their director was specifically implicated by villagers for having visited their village to conduct religious activities, a charge the director emphatically denies. Similar news reports addressed accusations that CAFE employees promoted the Protestant faith with donations of bicycles to underprivileged families. It was also reported that humanitarian aid from CAFE was only provided to Uzbek citizens agreeing to convert to Christianity.

¶3. (C) In March, CAFE's office in Nukus faced administrative charges for operating with an unregistered logo, utilizing the internet without proper licenses, and changing office directors three times without informing the MOJ. In Karshi, the MOJ requested that CAFE undergo the long and tedious process of re-registering in order to review the organization's documentation. On May 18, CAFE's headquarters in Tashkent was told that the Karshi office had been denied re-registration. The government audited the Samarkand branch office in November. The office recently received a letter detailing various problems, including discrepancies with licenses. The CAFE office in Gulistan is the only branch thus far that has survived court proceedings.

¶4. (C) Comment: CAFE has been operating in country for over thirteen years with few problems from the GOU. Authorities seemed to overlook the fact that CAFE representatives are widely known to hold bible studies and prayer groups with local community members. Up until now,

the success of their humanitarian aid and education projects may have played a role in their immunity. The GOU has changed their tune by initiating a nationwide crackdown in an attempt to force the organization out of the country. Many speculate that CAFE is simply the next in line to face the wrath of the MOJ, noting that some regional offices face purely administrative allegations. Many of the MOJ's criticism of CAFE echo those made against Internews, IREX, Freedom House, the Eurasia Foundation, the American Bar Association and Counterpart Consortium just prior to government expulsion. However, other CAFE offices face allegations of proselytizing, giving the impression that the GOU will utilize multiple tactics to expedite the organization's departure.

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